

## ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

**Poison oak** - Poison oak is a woody vine or shrub. Its lobed leaves resemble those of a true oak, are glossier, and typically bronze in February to March, bright green in the spring, yellow-green to reddish in the summer, and bright red or pink from late July to October. The plant is winter deciduous. Stems are leafless and bear only the occasional cluster of berries. Poison oak in all forms can cause itching and allergic after contact by touch or smoke inhalation. Become familiar with the plant in all of its stages to avoid contact.

**Black widow spider** - Dark brown or shiny black with red or orange “hourglass” (sometimes two dots) on the underbelly, the female black widow is generally reclusive. Though rarely fatal to adults, the spider’s venom is highly toxic—seek immediate medical attention if bitten.

**Ticks** - Ticks are blood-eating parasites that live and feed on mammals, birds, and reptiles around the world. Questing ticks crawl up stems of grass or perch on the edges of leaves with their front legs extended. When a potential host passes by, the ticks climb on. Feeding time varies from a couple of hours to weeks, depending on the type of host and type of tick. Ticks can transmit potentially dangerous diseases including Lyme disease, tularemia, and spotted fever illnesses.

Ways to protect yourself:

- Treat clothing and gear with products containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon or eucalyptus, or 2-undecanone.
- Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter and walk in the center of trails.

If you are exposed to ticks:

- Check body using a hand-held or full-length mirror.
- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors.
- Examine gear and pets.
- If bitten, use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible. Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Put the tick in a dry jar or Ziploc bag and save it in the freezer for later identification if necessary. Wash the area of the tick bite with a lot of warm, clean water. Apply a thin layer of petroleum jelly, lightly to the wound.

**Rattlesnakes** - San Diego County's only venomous snakes, rattlesnakes prey on small animals such as birds and rodents, live in a wide variety of habitats, and get their name from the rattles on the ends of their tails which produce a loud rattling noise that deters predators and serves as a warning to passers-by. San Diego County's four types of rattlesnakes are Southern Pacific Rattlesnake, Speckled Rattlesnake, Red Diamond Rattlesnake, and Desert Sidewinder. Rattlesnake populations in many areas are severely threatened by habitat destruction, poaching, and extermination campaigns.

Rattlesnakes are the leading contributor to snakebite injuries in North America. However, rattlesnakes rarely bite unless provoked or threatened; if treated promptly, the bites are seldom fatal. If sensing danger, they first try to escape or hide, so be sure to stay out of their way. Different rattlesnake species react in different ways: some remain still, relying on their cryptic coloration for camouflage, while others just glide away silently. If this isn't an option, they hiss, rattle their tail, and puff up their body to warn off an enemy. The rattle protects other animals from being bitten while at the same

time protects the snake from being stepped on! Most snakes give a warning before they bite, although they may strike quickly if they are startled during shedding, mating, or giving birth. When out walking in heavy brush or rocky areas, watch where you step or put your hands!

If bitten get to a hospital immediately. In the mean time keep the bitten area still. Remove any jewelry or constricting items near the affected area in case of swelling. Hold the extremity level with the heart, or in a position that would not make blood flow either up or down. Do not use ice to cool the bite, cut open the wound, try to suck out the venom, or use a tourniquet. This will cut off blood flow and the limb may be lost.

**Mountain lions** - Also known as cougars, pumas, or panthers, mountain lions are secretive and largely solitary by nature. Although considered nocturnal/crepuscular, daytime sightings do occur. They prefer dense underbrush and rocky areas for stalking, but can also live in open areas. They are territorial and survive at low population densities, are reclusive, and mostly avoid people. Fatal attacks on humans are rare, but have recently been increasing as more people enter their territories.

If you do encounter a mountain lion:

- Do not run.
- Make yourself appear larger by waving your arms or opening your jacket.
- Do not crouch down or bend over.
- If you have small children, pick them up.
- Back away slowly until the mountain lion moves away.
- Shout and throw rocks. Show that you are a threat to the mountain lion.

## Weather -

- Protect yourself against sunburn, dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Avoid the hottest time of day, which is usually around noon to 3pm. Sunscreen and proper clothing (hat, etc.) are absolutely essential on hikes in the sun.
- Always bring plenty of water for you and your dog. Dehydration can lead to cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.
- Heat stroke occurs when your body literally overheats. It is a serious medical condition that can strike fast and requires immediate medical attention. Pay particular attention to these signs: heavy sweating and rapid pulse, faintness and dizziness, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, throbbing headache, confusion, disorientation, and anxiety. It's important to treat heat exhaustion/stroke immediately. Look for a shady spot to lay down and rest and get out of the heat. Remove any excess clothing. If there aren't any trees to provide shade but you have a tarp, use it to block the sun. Drink plenty of water, and if you have electrolytes or salt tablets, use some of those. It can feel good to splash cool water on your face and head. If you're hiking near a lake or stream, dunk your head or dip a bandana or hat in the water and put it on your head.
- Prepare for cold weather at any time of the year, not just winter. Dress in layers to prepare for temperature fluctuations during your hike. Any skin that is exposed to freezing temperatures and cold wind is prone to frostbite. Take special care of your nose, cheeks, ears, fingers and toes. You can lose heat through the top of your head, so pull a winter hat on if you're feeling chilly.